

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1055

By Harwell

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Perry Wallace,  
Vanderbilt athlete and civil rights pioneer.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Perry Wallace, a native of Nashville, who integrated Southeastern Conference (SEC) varsity basketball as a student athlete at Vanderbilt University; and

WHEREAS, although a gifted athlete during his youth and a successful attorney and educator in his later professional life, Mr. Wallace is perhaps best remembered as a civil rights icon today; "Perry Wallace ... through quiet strength and courage blazed a trail that still serves as a lesson in resilience and perseverance in the face of incredible obstacles," according to Vanderbilt University Chancellor Nicholas S. Zeppos; and

WHEREAS, an All-American basketball player and class valedictorian at Nashville's Pearl High School, Perry Wallace led his team to a State championship and a perfect 31-0 season as a senior in 1965-1966; recruited nationally by more than eighty collegiate programs, he accepted a scholarship to attend Vanderbilt University because of its academic rigor, after being impressed by the genuine respect with which Coach Roy Skinner treated his parents; and

WHEREAS, Perry Wallace and Godfrey Dillard, a fellow recruit, arrived on the Vanderbilt campus in the fall of 1966, as the first African-American athletes at the university; and

WHEREAS, as members of Vanderbilt's freshman basketball team, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Dillard became the focal point of the Jim Crow South's rabid hostility toward African Americans; in addition to enduring discrimination and segregation, they were subjected to foul language, name-calling, and threats of violence, both on and off the court; and

WHEREAS, although fans and fellow players offered support at home, Vanderbilt was a lonely, sometimes hostile place for Mr. Wallace and the school's few other black students; and

WHEREAS, on December 2, 1967, Perry Wallace took the court as the first African-American varsity basketball player in the SEC and played his first SEC varsity game against Auburn two days later; and

WHEREAS, he remained a Commodore for the rest of his college career, bravely enduring racist taunts, hurled objects, and worse every time he played away from home; his poise and integrity in this groundbreaking role helped change the Southern landscape forever; and

WHEREAS, excelling as an athlete at Vanderbilt, Perry Wallace served as captain of the basketball team, was named Second Team All-SEC, and received the SEC Sportsmanship Award; off the court, he was recognized by his classmates as the most popular man on campus and graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree in 1970; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Vanderbilt, Mr. Wallace earned a law degree from Columbia University, where he was awarded a Charles Evans Hughes Fellowship; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wallace served as a senior trial attorney at the United States Department of Justice and a term on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology; and

WHEREAS, the first black tenured professor of law at the University of Baltimore, he subsequently taught at George Washington University before joining the faculty of American University's Washington College of Law, where he specialized in environmental law, corporate law, and finance and served as the director of the J.D./M.B.A. dual degree program; and

WHEREAS, a securities and commercial arbitrator, Mr. Wallace served on several professional panels, as well as the Board of Directors of the Environmental Working Group; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, Perry Wallace delivered the inaugural Murray lecture, named for his best friend and Pearl and Vanderbilt classmate Walter Murray, as part of the dedication of Murray House, a residence hall at The Martha Rivers Ingram Commons; and

WHEREAS, in 2015, his Vanderbilt classmates honored him by creating the Perry E. Wallace Jr. Scholarship to benefit deserving undergraduate students at the School of

Engineering; Mr. Wallace was inducted into the School of Engineering's Academy of Distinguished Alumni in 2016; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wallace was inducted as an inaugural member of the Vanderbilt Athletics Hall of Fame in 2008 and the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 2003; his jersey was retired by Vanderbilt in 2004, and he has been named an SEC Living Legend and to the Silver Anniversary All-America Team by the National Association of Basketball Coaches; and

WHEREAS, Vanderbilt Athletics honored Perry Wallace and other Civil Rights-era pioneers during the University's inaugural Equality Weekend in 2016; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wallace's culture-changing experience in integrating the SEC is the subject of the *New York Times* best-selling book *Strong Inside* by Andrew Maraniss, which has since been adapted into a young adult book of the same name; *Strong Inside* was selected as the Commons Reading for both the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years on The Martha Rivers Ingram Commons, Vanderbilt's first-year residential community; and

WHEREAS, Vanderbilt celebrated the historic 1967 season with a series of events, including commissioning and screening the documentary film *Triumph: The Untold Story of Perry Wallace*; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Wallace passed away on December 1, 2017, the day before the fiftieth anniversary of his trailblazing accomplishment, even as he was being honored with the SEC's prestigious Michael L. Slive Distinguished Service Award, along with teammate Godfrey Dillard and the four Kentucky football players who integrated SEC football; and

WHEREAS, Vanderbilt observed moments of silence to honor Perry Wallace before the women's basketball game on December 2 and the men's game on December 3, 2017, in Memorial Gym, and commemorative posters marking the fiftieth anniversary of the integration of the SEC were given to fans; and

WHEREAS, the Vanderbilt University Alumni Association honored Mr. Wallace with the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Award, which is the highest honor bestowed upon a member of the university's alumni community and recognizes a graduate whose accomplishments and contributions have had the broadest impact and most positive effect on humankind; and

WHEREAS, Perry Wallace is survived by his wife, Karen, his daughter, Gabrielle, and a host of extended family members; and

WHEREAS, Perry Wallace evinced truth and integrity while working to bring about progress in American society, laying the foundation of the diversity and inclusion we have today; in the words of Chancellor Zeppos, "Perry gave us so much more than we ever gave him"; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should commemorate the bountiful life of this remarkable gentleman who was a force for positive change on so many levels; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Perry Wallace, reflecting fondly upon his inner strength and courage while integrating the SEC as a Vanderbilt basketball player, his distinguished career as an attorney and educator, and his enduring legacy as a civil rights pioneer and icon.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family, colleagues, and many friends and admirers of Mr. Wallace.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.